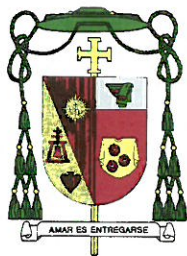


# DIocese of San Bernardino



## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

October 10, 2016

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The death penalty has been legal in our state nearly 40 years. The coming election gives us as Catholics a chance to raise our prophetic voice, to witness for life and to change public policy in California for the better. Proposition 62 would abolish the death penalty and replace it with a sentence of life without the possibility of parole. I urge you to join me and my brother bishops of California in voting 'Yes' on Prop 62. Another ballot measure, Proposition 66, would amend the law to expedite the execution of those sentenced to death. I urge you to vote 'No' on Prop 66.

I acknowledge that the matter of capital punishment is a difficult one for a great many people of goodwill and of strong faith. I invite all to take their feelings on this emotional topic to God in prayer and to have honest, civil dialogue in their communities of faith about it.

The principles of justice, accountability and safety may emerge in our minds as reasons that some people in our society warrant an execution. For those whose lives have been touched by the violent death of a loved one, it is an even deeper issue. It is assumed that those who have lost a child, spouse, relative or friend to murder are more likely to favor the death penalty. Supporters of maintaining the death penalty often say that it provides a measure of peace or relief to the family that the killer also loses their life.

I am thankful to God that our Ministry of Restorative Justice includes reaching out to those families who have lost a member to murder. It has given us an opportunity to listen to these wounded brothers and sisters, to pray with them and to help them find God's mercy and healing. What we have found through this ministry is that, for many of these families, the death penalty is not an instrument of healing. It only perpetuates the violence and pain.

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When we make punishment by death the law of land we, as a society, perpetuate the idea that violence is an acceptable solution to our problems. And as we witness the tragic tide of violence gripping our communities, our state and our nation we know that this is not the right road. We look to our God and we pray for peace and mercy. We know that killing is not the answer, it is not the model for our children, it does not make us safer and more secure. It does not speak to the redemptive nature of our faith.

Pope Francis addressed this issue last year when he spoke to the U.S. Congress, urging a global abolition of the death penalty. He said, *"I am convinced that this way is the best, since every life is sacred, every human person is endowed with an inalienable dignity, and society can only benefit from the rehabilitation of those convicted of crimes... I also offer encouragement to all those who are convinced that a just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation."*

So we should no longer accept that state sanctioned killing is codified in our laws. Other states including Illinois, Maryland, New Mexico, Delaware and Connecticut have come to this conclusion within the last decade. Providentially, we have a chance to join that list next month, to reject the Culture of Death and to celebrate the redemptive, healing power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What a way to answer the call to mercy in this Jubilee Year.

May God bless you and your family.

In Christ,



Most Reverend Gerald R. Barnes  
Bishop of the Diocese of San Bernardino

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